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ABSTRACT

The experience of El Camino College in starting a Labor Studies Program is recounted. The issues and problems discussed are: Advisory Committee Model, College or Union Control?, Administration and Faculty Support, Funding, Enrollment Projections, Coordination, Publicity and Student Recruitment, College Credit, Course Content, Who Should Be Selected to Teach?, Textbooks and Other Materials, Student Characteristics, and Student Feedback. (DB)

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# LABOR STUDIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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"Labor Studies is a program long overdue in the community college," says Stuart Marsee, Superintendent-President of El Camino College, where an Associate degree and certificate program was started last year. "Public education and community colleges have been strongly supported by organized labor for a long time," Marsee notes, "but only recently have the unions come to us with requests for a specific program to educate working men and women about labor relations. We have offered job-training curricula of value to working people. We have provided both on and off-campus programs in supervision and management that dealt with employer-employee relations. But Labor Studies is offered to help those involved in the labor movement understand their rights, responsibilities and opportunities."

Labor Studies began at El Camino College in the 1973 Fall semester following a one year planning effort by labor leaders in the Los Angeles area working with members of the College staff. Carroll Hutton and Al Haener of the United Auto Workers first proposed the program to Wallace Cohen, El Camino Vice President- Instruction, in 1972. Hutton and Haener presented the need for the program in terms of the new social responsibility that unions must assume because of their growth and development as economic and political forces. They envisicned the community college as specially suited for both general education to expand the horizons of working people and the specific new information and skills needed in such subjects as collective bargaining, grievance procedures, labor law, and communication. Most unions have extensive educational programs. Universities have provided

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opportunity to study the labor movement through law schools, graduate programs in Management, Economics or History, and non-credit extension or institute programs. But there have been very few programs available at the level where the rank-and-file laborer can participate to earn college credit. The "people's college," which is geographically convenient, tuition-free and open admission appeared to Hutton and Haener to be an ideal means of providing educational opportunity to a larger number of working men and women. In retrospect, the surprising fact is not that Labor Studies programs are being developed in community colleges, but that they were not started there much sooner.

Probably the first community college Labor Studies program was begun at Merritt College in Oakland, California, in cooperation with the University of California Institute of Industrial Relations and a grant from the Ford Foundation. The Merritt College effort was aimed specifically at improvement of the educational backgrounds and leadership potential of minority workers. At about the same time Haener and Hutton proposed that El Camino offer Labor Studies, a similar suggestion was made to the administration at City College of San Francisco by David ~~Selden~~ Jenkins and other labor leaders from the Bay Area. Recent reports have been noted of Labor Studies offerings in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Texas, Connecticut and Canada.

On the premise that the issues and problems that were part of the El Camino effort in starting a Labor Studies program may be of interest to others who contemplate such a move, the remainder of this article will be an attempt to recount that experience.

Advisory Committee Model

El Camino College, like most community colleges, has a solid record of cooperation with advisory committees in program development, so it was natural

that this model was adapted for Labor Studies. The plan to establish an advisory committee was reviewed with Al Haener, Jack Blackburn of the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations, Paul Perlin of the Southern California Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union and Robert White of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor AFL-CIO. Each made suggestions for members of the committee and eighteen labor leaders from the area were asked to serve on the initial committee. Because of the unique nature of the new program the committee membership was drawn from offices and residences beyond the local district boundaries. Among the unions represented in addition to UAW and ILWU were OCAW (Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers), IAM (International Association of Machinists), SEIU (Service Employees International Union), AFT (American Federation of Teachers), AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees), CWA (Communications Workers of America), UCIW (United Cannery and Industrial Workers of the Pacific) and Stereotypers. During the first year of the program, the committee established a means for adding to its own membership and a representative of the Teamsters was invited to serve. Predictably, some members were more active than others, but all have attended one or more meetings the first year. The committee met almost every month during the planning stages. Once the major issues have been resolved it should be necessary for the committee to meet about three or four times a year. The great diversity in the manner of operation, points of view and democratic procedures of various unions became obvious in the early meetings of the committee. The advice from the planning group to seek wide representation was apparently valid. As a result of the attempt to include a variety of union leaders, however, local union leadership is under-represented. The plan discussed at San Francisco City College to name a large

group of Labor Associated consisting of local leaders may have merit in extending liaison between the college and labor groups.

College or Union Control?

A major issue that surfaced early at El Camino, as well as at San Francisco, has been the question of who makes the ultimate decisions that affect the program. Union leaders, understandably, were apprehensive, for example, that instructors or materials might be selected which would reflect anti-union bias. This issue of control was mediated at El Camino largely through the efforts of Jack Blackburn and the UCLA Institute by means of a caucus of the labor members of the advisory committee for a discussion of how authority might be shared. College officials made clear their desire to benefit from the advice of the committee and to cooperatively decide matters of staffing, curriculum, student status and other concerns within the framework of established college policy and practice. For example, the advisory committee could describe the kind of educational experience needed by a typical union member, or in other words, what did he need to be able to do or understand? It would then be up to the dean and faculty of the Social Science division, where responsibility for the program was assigned, to translate these expressions into course content for review and approval by the General Curriculum Committee, the Vice President for Instruction, the Superintendent-President, the College Board of Trustees and the California Community College Board of Governors. Objections or questions might arise at any step in the process which would have to be resolved through further discussion and action.

Administration and Faculty Support

Those who are knowledgeable about higher education are well aware of what is known as the "faculty prerogative" in curriculum as well as the hard

reality that without understanding and approval by the administrative staff a proposal for a new program has little or no chance. The union members within the ranks of the El Camino faculty could be expected to respond favorably. Equally as important to establishment of the program was the professional attitude on the part of the majority of the faculty that important matters of human concern are legitimately the subject of academic attention. That is not to say that there were no questions raised about such things as duplication of existing programs, level of instruction, qualification of instructors and the like. But when objective answers were provided, there was no opposition. In at least one other college approached by Carroll Hutton the proposal died for lack of faculty support.

Administrative support for Labor Studies at El Camino has been demonstrated in a variety of ways. The Superintendent-President kept members of the Board of Trustees fully informed from the time the proposal was first made. The Vice President expressed confidence in the decision-making ability of the division staff and the advisory committee. Much of the enthusiasm for publicizing the program that was demonstrated by the advisory committee stemmed from their perception of the good faith of the College personnel in serving the needs of their constituencies.

Funding

El Camino College, a single campus district in a large metropolitan area of Southwest Los Angeles County, has maintained a sound financial base of operation during its 27 years of existence. One of the correlatives of this economic position has been the willingness and ability of the governing board to begin some new programs without the decision hinging on the prospect of funding sources other than the local district and state support. When the

proposal for Labor Studies was made, it could be accepted on its merits and not depend on federal, foundation or union funds. Nor is the program, once begun, jeopardized by the prospect of funds being cut off by an outside agency. Of course, the College receives state support for students enrolled, but the contribution of the local district amounts to at least two-thirds of the cost.

Enrollment Projections

Prediction of enrollment in new programs is usually difficult and Labor Studies was no exception. Advisory committee members were more optimistic than College officials. The UAW estimated that about 13,000 dues paying members lived or worked in the El Camino district, but there seemed to be no practical way to determine the number who might enroll. Machinists and longshoremen thought they had about 5,000 members. Consistent with the general plan to introduce the program in phases, the decision was made to offer two courses in the 1973 Fall semester, which would enroll a maximum of 88 students.

Some members of the advisory committee expressed the view that enrollment in the courses should be restricted to those selected by their unions for leadership roles. Others viewed the primary thrust of Labor Studies as mainly for the rank-and-file worker. Yet another point of view was that of general education--that most students should be exposed to the concepts that have been part of the labor movement. Members of the College staff proposed that enrollment in classes be open to allow students the opportunity to find out for themselves if they could benefit from the program, and this view prevailed with the advisory committee. During the first semester a class entitled The American Labor Movement and a class in Applied Labor Law were offered, each meeting three hours on different nights of the week, from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. When more students sought to enroll than the 44 maximum

for each section, the Dean secured additional instructors to accomodate approximately 70 students in each class. The demand for the program appeared to be demonstrated and the optimism of the advisory committee justified.

While direct financial incentive was not initially planned at El Camino, as had been possible under the Ford Foundation program at Merritt College, neither were there serious financial constraints. The staff and advisory committee recognized the enormous problem of recruiting and holding students in the face of long working days and financial pressures that cause many to "moonlight" or require both adults in the family to work.

Coordination

During the planning stages an individual with long experience in the labor movement proposed that a coordinator was needed for the program and offered to seek the funds from various unions to support himself in that role. His offer was referred to the advisory committee which deferred action. At that time it was not clear how much coordination was needed. The College Administration re-emphasized its determination to depend upon the advisory committee for much of the contact with local unions. Under the decentralized administrative scheme of the College, the division dean was expected to play an active role in program development. The College also maintained that appointment of a coordinator should involve the faculty and advisory committee in a selection process which would meet equal opportunity and affirmative action guidelines. Both the committee members and College officials recognized that a coordinator might be effective in promoting the program and increasing enrollment. On the other hand, it was difficult to justify a new position when the enrollment was uncertain. At San Francisco City College, where the program is conceived as partially adult and community service, as distinguished from the exclusively college credit class program at El Camino, the coordinator

position was conceived to include the services to labor in research, fact-finding, mediation or consultation.

Publicity and Student Recruitment

Along with approval of the principle of Labor Studies by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor came an offer to mail to all locals in the Federation an announcement of the program. The Social Science division had budgeted for printing a brochure at the campus repro center, but the importance of the brochure being produced by a union shop had been overlooked. A local union shop printer was secured to print the first brochures, and for the second year, Jerry Lamothe, UAW representative on the advisory committee, was instrumental in getting the brochures printed at no cost to the College. Envelopes were provided by the County Federation and the College paid the postage. The UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations mailed about 500 brochures to those on its mailing list. Several unions distributed similar amounts. Design of the brochure was a project of several members of the advisory committee working with the Social Science division staff. A new brochure has been published each semester to announce the current offerings, listing courses, times, dates and instructors. Information about services of the Learning Center and the Counseling Office was included.

Swing shift workers proposed that a daytime section of one of the classes would be of interest to them. Two sections of Labor Law were offered during the Spring of 1974 with a total enrollment of 79. Many of the day students took the course for its general interest to them rather than because of a union affiliation. A few saw it as part of a pre-law program.

College Credit

The kind of college credit that would enable workers to attain skills, prestige, and status comparable to that enjoyed by management in the labor relations field was important to the members of the advisory committee from the outset. Non-credit adult education programs are offered by the high schools in the district, so there was no question on the part of the College about the level at which the program should be planned. While non-transfer remedial courses are offered in some divisions, courses in the Social Science division have, for the most part, been planned to permit a student to transfer them to apply toward a Bachelor's degree, which was exactly what the advisory committee had in mind. The problem to be anticipated was the attitude of Baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Preliminary discussions with four-year college administrators indicated that transfer would be possible, but the specifics were left somewhat uncertain. Enrollment estimates for the transfer institutions would depend partly on the persistence rate of those who began Labor Studies at the community college, an unknown factor. Since the experience of the first year, more formal discussions have begun, and the attitude of the transfer institutions continues to be receptive.

Anyone connected with labor-management relations needs not be convinced about the breadth and complexity of the content and resources available as part of a Labor Studies effort. Some concern was expressed by Board members, faculty members and administrators that the courses should be more than "rap sessions" to promote union biases. Fortunately, the members of the advisory committee had already expressed similar sentiments. They were convinced that if the program were to succeed it would need a solid factual base. If there was any disagreement on content, it was over questions

of "which facts." In one of the first classes offered, after a presentation about some of the most intolerable conditions in the history of the lives of working men and women, a mature student asked, "When are we going to get management's point of view?" To which the instructor replied, "You aren't." If you want to study that, take courses in supervision and management." The conversation illustrates the extremes, however, and other class discussions and research projects have involved serious critiques of labor and labor organizations.

Course Content

When asked what their members needed, labor leaders stressed the following: (not in order of importance)

1. Communications, especially the ability to speak before a group or as a member of a group. Since union meetings typically follow rules of order, information about parliamentary procedure should be included.
2. The law as it affects working people and what means they have to improve it.
3. Knowledge about how labor is organized.
4. Ability to function as a member of a group with understanding of the interpersonal dynamics involved.
5. How to negotiate a labor contract.
6. The background of the labor movement--a more comprehensive understanding of its achievements and goals.
7. The role of labor in the world economy and knowledge about how economic systems work.

Associate degrees awarded by community colleges in California are required by statute to include defined majors of at least 20 units out of the 60 unit total. Most community colleges also award certificates in various fields to students who complete a prescribed set of courses of at least 20 units excluding general education courses. Within this framework,

El Camino was able to introduce a plan by which students could earn a certificate or degree, or simply take courses as desired. Six new courses were outlined, modification of two existing courses to provide for special emphasis was proposed, and a list of electives from many disciplines was recommended to provide general education breadth. The new courses were History 20, The American Labor Movement; History 21, Contemporary Labor Problems; Economics 20, Labor Economics; Economics 21, Collective Bargaining; Political Science 20, Introduction to Applied Labor Law; and Political Science 21, Labor in American Politics. Since the College no longer offered an Industrial Psychology course, it was proposed that an interdisciplinary American Studies course along the lines of "Human Relations in Democratic Society" be developed. The Fine Arts division was asked to identify an instructor and section of Speech 1, Effective Speaking, which could be used to emphasize the needs of Labor Studies students.

Other colleges have created Labor Studies departments. El Camino has chosen to offer the courses within existing disciplines to minimize the possibility of the program becoming too isolated, to enhance the multi-disciplinary nature of the study, and to indicate a clear intention that the courses carry lower division degree credit, transferrable toward the Bachelor's degree.

The bias of the division dean against imposing prerequisites unless a crucial sequence could be demonstrated was revealed in the program as adopted at El Camino. Students invited to comment on their experience toward the close of the second semester, however, thought that the order in which they took some of the courses might have better been more structured. They thought, for instance, that Labor Law should precede Collective Bargaining, and a general Economics course should be taken before Labor Economics. This

issue will be reviewed next year.

Who Should Be Selected to Teach?

When Labor Studies was first contemplated at El Camino it was assumed that most of the courses would probably be taught by labor leaders brought in for one or two courses per semester. Will Scoggins, a full-time member of the History faculty who had served with the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations during a leave of absence from El Camino a few years ago, was a natural choice for The American Labor Movement course. When a part-time instructor for the Labor Law course had not been secured by the month before the class was to meet, Dr. Charles Sohner, El Camino Political Science professor with an interest in labor, agreed to teach it with assurances by the advisory committee that guest lecturers would be available. Collective Bargaining has been taught by an attorney with experience in labor negotiations. Another attorney who has done graduate work at UCLA in labor history was assigned to the overflow section of the American Labor Movement class. Labor Economics was taught by an El Camino Economics instructor at the suggestion of the advisory committee. For the most part, active recruitment of instructors has been necessary on the part of the division dean. Guest lecturers have willingly given of their time and talent. Union officials, labor attorneys, state and federal government personnel and industrial relations officers have presented valuable information.

Textbooks and Other Materials

Several unions have contributed books, pamphlets and other printed materials. Faculty members have sought out appropriate textbooks, paperbacks and other pamphlet materials for their classes. The El Camino Library is in the process of publishing a Labor Studies bibliography of the items in its

collection. Materials are available; the problem is to select those which appear to be most useful.

Student Characteristics

One-fourth of the students who enrolled in the first two classes offered were taking their first college class. About twenty percent had already earned the equivalent of an Associate degree or more. Over eighty percent reported that they were working forty hours or more per week in addition to attending college. About one-third had held some type of leadership position in a union. Over half indicated an intention to earn an Associate degree or certificate in Labor Studies. Attempts to get information from students who dropped out of the classes were generally unsuccessful as they had apparently moved away. In a few cases students informed the instructors that the pressure of a full-time job, union responsibilities and college was too much.

Student Feedback

Advisory committee members reported at each meeting during the first year of the program that the members of their unions who were enrolled in the classes thought they were of great value. Toward the close of the second semester, students were invited to meet with the advisory committee and instructors to discuss their experience and how it could be improved. The kind of comments that made the effort worth-while for college staff members and the advisory committee were those like:

"The course helped me decide to run for union office."

"I don't think anyone should be a union official who doesn't have most of the information I learned in this class."

"You have to learn what your rights are on the job or you might lose them. That is the chief value of a course in labor law."

> "This course taught me to appreciate the vast strides that have been made over many years' time to improve the lot of the working man."

With enrollments exceeding expectations each semester and continuing to increase, the future of Labor Studies looks promising. The potential is enormous, and if unions should negotiate expanded educational opportunity clauses in their contracts with employers, the community colleges may find the demand multiplying.

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